Democracy is capturing international headlines and gaining global momentum when, paradoxically, its modern home, the imagined and sovereign collectivity called the nation-state, has never appeared more threatened. Hardly a day goes by when new evidence does not materialize indicating that the planetary electronic economy animated by the creation of new systems and cultures of circulation are rendering the borders of even the most empowered nation-states increasingly permeable. Yet, as globalizing processes rapidly transform the conditions and possibilities of nation-making and -maintaining, democratization is in full swing in a significant number of once authoritarian regimes (such as Argentina, Cambodia, and Chile), in the state socialist republics of the former Soviet Bloc (exemplified by the unification of Germany and the recent applicants to the European Union), and perhaps most dramatically, in the southern cone of Africa. Moreover, a number of newly independent states appear to have made a smooth transition from colonialist, apartheid, or authoritarian regimes to constitutional democracies—Papua New Guinea, South Africa, and Hungary being cases in point. In the eyes of many, there has been a near total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to democracy, and more than that, to the Western version of liberal democratic governance (Fukuyama 1989; Lipset 1990; and Plattner 1996). Critically, the emergence of identity politics, with its
emphasize on rights and freedoms, has accompanied this process or deepening of
democratization. From long-established states (e.g. Canada and Norway) to newly minted ones
(e.g. Macedonia and Israel), within the corridors of the United Nations and other institutions
concerned with human rights and freedoms, a politics of collective identity, suffering, and
entitlement has emerged as a critical center of attention. The turn toward democracy by cultures
whose views of politics and personhood, representation and power, governance and
governmentality are very different from those of the West, plus the explosive ascension of
identity movements in which the terms of identity and the thrust of the movements are much
newer than their public ideologies admit, cannot help but underline the issue of just what
democracy is. Put another way, in the age of globalization, under the weight of the continuing
economic and political encompassment of others by the Western metropole, what can democracy
mean to these new democracies, and what are the prospects for freedom and emancipation?
How do “we”—and it is very uncertain who this new subject is—enlarge “our” institutions of
justice and develop a more cosmopolitan political culture in order to keep up with the expansion
of the global economy?

As theorists from all continents continue to observe, the story line of the past quarter
century is the near worldwide transitions from colonial, authoritarian, and/or apartheid regimes
to multicultural capitalist-oriented democracies. Even though metropolitan states and interstate
agencies have aggressively sought to transplant the EuroAmerican [Au: I would prefer to leave it
as it is to underline their intrinsic connection] vision of governance, the sociopolitical character
of these newly established democracies seems to guarantee that their conceptual foundations,
substantive goals, and institutional execution of democracy will diverge from Western
orthodoxy. At the same time, from the edges of the empire, political and academic, analyses
across a wide array of disciplines, geographic areas, and theoretical standpoints are beginning to question the premise, if not the basic wisdom, of simply transplanting Western democracy to replace indigenous forms of governance (e.g. Chatterjee 1986; Dominguez 1989; Mamdani 1996; and Comaroff and Comaroff 1997).\footnote{1} Noting the fluidity of global geographies and local histories, Shapiro notes that “discourses such as comparative politics and international relations appear increasingly inadequate” (1994: 497) to tackle the issues at hand. Taking this argument a step further, Lee (1995) submits that while theorists have begun to investigate how global processes bypass state control (e.g. by empowering NGOs), they must go further and create a theory that allows them to examine democratization and the rise of new democracies from a non-state-centered perspective. Put positively, the position is that we (the academic community) can understand a given democracy as cultural practice only if our practice consists in locating that democracy in terms of the cultural and historical realities that made it possible.\footnote{2} So starting from indigenous views of politics and citizenship, the Comaroffs (1997) illustrate that though Botswana is avowedly democratic, the Western concept of democratic governance appears to its citizens to be too episodic, too anti-populist, and too prone to open a chasm between the state and civil society. In the same vein, Schaffer (1998) shows that the Senegalese conception of what democracy is (and is not) not only goes far beyond the “proceduralist” claim that elections should be fair and free, but that at a more fundamental level it is founded on a different social ontology of what constitutes a fair and free election. Taken collectively, these studies show that global history and local realities seem to be creating a politics of governance that is beyond the understanding of Western-centric, nation-state based approaches to democracy. To theorize democracy in a universe defined by (post)modern globalization it seems necessary to fashion a language and space where we can dislodge, problematize, and redefine the deeply naturalized
categories that have too long dominated the study of democracy. The aim must be to shape an
approach that permits what the political philosopher Charles Taylor calls “new vocabularies of
comparison” (1992: 67).

Orthodox political theory has been responsible for minting and maintaining the old
vocabulary of comparison. Insofar as these theorists believe that the concepts of democracy
common to the West are the basis for a universal notion and analysis of democracy, we can
usefully characterize this viewpoint as ethno-analytical; that is, it grasps its ethnography of
Western democracy as providing the foundation for a universally applicable analytical model.
From the ethno-analytical viewpoint, Western democracy is a nation-state based system of
political governance. Whether parliamentary or presidential, federal or unitary, the citizens,
acting through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives, hold their rulers
publicly accountable for their actions (e.g. Schmitter and Karl 1996). For this to occur, a
number of corollary institutions are necessary, including the bricks and mortar of democracy that
serve to insure the integrity and fairness of the process. Of these, fair, free, and frequent
elections have gotten the most publicity and are routinely singled out by political theorists and
development agencies (Lively 1975: 39-30). For elections to be meaningful, control over
government decisions and decision-making must be vested in elected officials and virtually all
adult citizens must have the right to participate in the process. In order to make informed
decisions about the actions of the elected, and thus hold them accountable, citizens must have
access to sources of information and evaluation that are not under government control (Dahl
1998: 85-86). The persons, sources, and expression of relevant information must be free and
unencumbered by the threat or acts of government retaliation or censorship. To generate and
adequately use this information to influence government policy, citizens must have the right not
only to vote their conscious but also to assemble “interest-group associations and social movements” (Diamond and Plattner 1996:xii). On this view, freedom is the right to choose from an expansive range of alternatives, with the emphasis on choice. Note that though recent analyzes place greater stress on voluntary associations and social movements, they are more in the way of footnotes to Schumpeter’s classic definition of democracy as “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggles for the people’s vote” (1943: 296). As in all the elaborations that would follow, Schumpeter’s definition fixates on the procedures of the domestic political field. Indeed, this perspective presupposes that freedom is part and product of a national political culture.

The ethno-analytical perspective understands democracy as a set of procedures and institutional arrangements—what many have called the procedural view of democracy. On this account, the function of the legal system is to insure the authenticity and felicity of these procedures. So positive laws that protect freedom of speech, the rights of assembly and association, and regular elections, and negative sanctions that punish tampering with the ballot box, bribing elected officials, and otherwise undermining the integrity of the procedures serve to guarantee democracy. In this schematic, the politico-legal document that establishes and consecrates the sovereignty of society—meaning all citizens—over the elected legislature and the authority of the legislature over the apparatus of the state is the constitution and/or bill of rights (Held 1987: 284). While an extraordinary set of variants on this theme are possible—in terms of constitutional design, political pluralism, party strength, organization of checks and balances, to name a few—the dominant, unquestioned leitmotif is that democracy is a set of procedures, institutions, and laws designed to connect the person as individual and citizen to the
political processes of nation-state governance. This is the dominant discourse of the field and the one that the metropole exports.

But there is another voice, the resonant voice of Habermas who seems to have played a significant part in orienting Henke’s account of what democracy is. Indeed, the conception of political culture that lies at the heart of this account is derived from the critical social theory of democracy articulated by Habermas over more than a quarter century. Central to Habermas’ concerns is whether, under the current social and economic conditions, it is possible to constitute a political culture that would allow for a vibrant public sphere. In his early investigations of the conditions of capitalist democracy (1989), Habermas saw the public sphere as a historically constituted discursive space lying between civil society and state institutions. That space was a zone of unfettered public conversation and contestation that, by shaping and reshaping public opinion, monitored and checked the actions of the state. Habermas does not have unbounded faith in the strength of political culture or exaggerate the powers of the public sphere. He is all too aware that it is often exclusionary, as exemplified by the status of African-Americans in any number of American countries, and also ideological in the sense that the ruling class contrives ways of disguising and misrepresenting its powers and intentions (1996). Nevertheless, the concept of the public sphere is critical to Habermas’ project of a socially critical theory of democracy because it offers the possibility of a public political culture that could rationally steer democratic society. For this to be realized, public political culture must be able to determine its truths and plan its projects independently of social and economic forces.

For Habermas, democracy is not a single specie of governance, a method for choosing rulers, or a specific organization of society; it is a matter of self-determination and degrees of political freedom. Democracy is an arrangement that permits all citizens to truly participate in
discursive and general will formation. Thus the realization of democracy and freedom is never simply a question of the formal inclusion of voters, and Habermas underlines that increased suffrage has not always led to increased freedom, especially when, as in the case of Jamaica, Haiti, and some other Caribbean nations, the standard of living has not improved. Habermas’ contention that freedom is not simply a matter of procedures and institutions is intended as a critique of Western formal democracy and its ethno-analytical partner. But, even if this critique is correct, what are the prospects for a contemporary public sphere and political culture?

Habermas’ analysis of the unfolding of democracy in the twentieth century led him to conclude that it was impossible to ground or articulate a critical theory of democracy through a comparative analysis of existing socio-political formations (Calhoun 1995: 32). So he turned instead to elaborating the universal conditions for the production of political culture. In an influential review of Habermas’ account of democracy, Postone (1997) argues decisively that because he understood Marx’s theory as affirming technocratic domination, Habermas all but disowns a critique of economy, arguing that overcoming material burdens and economic domination are insufficient conditions for the production of freedom or a viable political culture. Remarkably reversing his earlier position, Habermas argues that a viable political sphere and culture itself provides the ground for the critique of economy. Accordingly, he proposes an evolutionary paradigm defined by two very separate, if interdependent, transhistorical and transcultural spheres. The first sphere is that of the economy; the second sphere is that of communicative interaction (1984). As Habermas’ theory of communicative action makes clear, each sphere is defined and animated by its own historical structures and processes of development. Within this scheme, it is the sphere of interaction that provides the basis for social critique and the possibility of emancipation. The position posits an evolutionary theory of the
internal logic of the development of political culture specifically and the social economy generally. The paramount claim that grounds others is that this is a universal evolutionary logic by which linguistically mediated discourse progressively organizes what Habermas has long called the life world. The result is an abstract model of democracy against which we can judge actually existing democracies. On these grounds, Henke can reasonably claim that Jamaican democracy (and, for that matter, the other democracies of the Caribbean) is seriously flawed because a substantial portion of the population literally has no say in what is going on: Jamaican democracy, not only in its singularity but also as a type, does not measure up to the immanent standard of well-founded communicative reason. In other words, although the Jamaican state is procedurally democratic, and is so recognized in the globally circulated discourse of democracy, it is not genuinely democratic because the procession of governments have not been connected to civil society in any meaningful way. This is a valid case. More, it is true of a substantial number of new democracies, perhaps most of the postcolony. It is also the case that democratic analysis cannot adequately account for a dysfunctional rupture this general simply by considering the failures of individual governments, politicians, and governing classes, however palpable and lamentable.

Indeed, it is also at this conjuncture that globalizing processes, or, more precisely, that dimension of globalization that is defined by the encompassment of others by metropolitan capitalism and culture becomes so germane (Held 1991). For the issue made unavoidable by the ascension of circulatory capitalism and the global restructuring of production (in which certain states, such as China, are the main beneficiaries and others, such as Jamaica, are essentially marginalized from all but its most exploitative aspects), is whether either a proceduralist or a communicative theory of democracy possesses the power to grasp the effects of these highly
asymmetrical globalizing processes and hence some of the most telling problems facing any assessment of a democracy, such as that of Jamaica. The issue turns on the extent to which these theorizations can grasp the emergence of the new forms created by the increasing power and political reach of contemporary “cultures of circulation” (Lee and LiPuma 2002).

Despite quite different visions of what democracy is, the procedural viewpoint and that sponsored by Habermas have a critical convergence: they both externalize (post)modern capitalism and the economy. In the procedural theory, the economy becomes an independent variable; in the Habermasian, it becomes an interacting sphere. In both accounts, capitalism and its globalization remain external to the constitution of freedom and emancipation. Against these views, Robotham (in press) argues by example and, I would argue correctly, that economic realities and the state of freedom and emancipation are functionally inseparable. Globalization re-maps the conditions of democracy because the entire issue of how citizens can determine their political system is fundamentally transformed if the historic and only publicly visible addressee of political claims—the state—no longer has the power to respond substantively. There is a good argument to be made that the dis-empowered states respond in the only way still accessible to them: ideologically-saturated ceremonies and symbols. Globalizing capitalism has reduced the disempowered of the earth to the play of domestic symbols, ceremonies, and traditions, awarding them an extraordinary amount of latitude to oversee and orchestrate whatever has no meaning or implications for Western globalization. A pointed example is the character of the production of national monies, such as Jamaica’s ideologically-inspired depiction of its freedom fighter, Marcus Garvey, on its notes and coins (Carnegie 1999). Transnational money markets and bankers see absolutely no harm (and possibility some good) in allowing the Jamaican elite to manipulate the images on the coins and notes for whatever purposes, precisely because they
know that in the reality of world money markets—exemplified by financial derivatives such as currency swaps\(^3\)—there is no such autonomous (the term of art is “hard”) object as Jamaican currency.\(^4\) There is thus little reason to assume that the globalization of capitalism through the massive and accelerating expansion of systems of circulation and the restructuring of production simply frames or provides the backdrop to the production of present democracies, whereas there is every reason to assume that this dynamic is an immanent, indispensable, and intrinsic aspect. If this is, as we argue, the case then analysis cannot grasp (post)modern democracies solely in terms of concepts like the state or political culture because globally defined systems of circulation and production are altering the conditions of people’s freedom in deeply structural ways that are beyond the reach of recognition or regulation.

The realities of hegemony and encompassment also inflect any discourse and valuation of democratic alternatives. This stems from the history that the narrow procedural account of democracy is not simply an analytical concept or descriptive. We are condensing a much longer argument when we say that the power of the metropolitan states allows them to establish the procedural stance on democracy as the historically entrenched, highly powered, and most discursive form (LiPuma 1999). Other nation-states are counted as democratic if they meet and adhere to these criteria—keeping in mind that whether or not a given nation-state meets and adheres to these criteria is inseparable from the representations of those who control that state, and the acceptance of these representations by the metropolitan countries. Thus, for example, Cuba (like formerly apartheid South Africa) may loudly proclaim that it is a democracy (hear, for example, Fidel Castro’s independence day radio addresses); however, its marginal location within the global political economy, its image in the internationalized public sphere as a violator of human rights, its constriction of political communication, and the committed opposition of the
United States all prevent this claim from sticking. Being a “democracy” is not part of Cuba’s negotiable global political capital. In the same vein, Mexico also claims to be a democracy. And, given its geopolitical importance as a populous oil-producing nation, the appearance of some of the procedural criteria for democracy (e.g. “free and fair” elections), plus the support of its northern neighbor, the world generally accepts the Mexican claim. This is true even if non-elected agents make the crucial national decisions in both Cuba and Mexico, even if we would be hard pressed to prove that people in Chiapas, the Yucatan, or the slums of Mexico City have more freedom than those of Santiago de Cuba or Havana. By the same token, freely-elected governments that transgress the limits of procedural democracy and pursue “radical” polices of redistribution and social justice are judged by metropolitan states, such as the U.S., to be undemocratic. The exemplar here is, of course, the American led violent overthrow of the Allende regime though there are numerous other examples of pressure and symbolic violence.

Having framed the Western image of democracy, we are in a better position to reassess the Caribbean materials. A founding principle of liberal democracy of all stripes, and one articulated in the Jamaican case, is that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the individual and the nation-state. This vision of democracy sees institutional structures, such as political parties and voluntary associations, as vehicles for the expression of individual rights and liberties. The correspondence of individuals and the nation-state is possible when and where there is homogeneity of civic culture and values and when the agents have equality of opportunity to participate in the political process. But what happens in those historical instances, which turn out to be the archetype, when cultural concepts of inequality founded on notions of race/religion/ethnicity, in concert with extraordinary disparities within the political economy preclude any such correspondence? What happens when issues of social identity,
especially when linked to class position, intrude into the political sphere? The orthodox
democratic theory pressed by the metropolitan states understands this as a political problem to be
resolved by the principle of inclusion—meaning the extension of voting rights, the restructuring
of political districts, and economic set-asides. The theory grasps the marginalization of certain
classes of agents in a contingent and teleological way, viewing it as a historical slip that can be
rectified by further democratic progress towards the horizon of inclusivity. Critically if not
ironically, Habermas maintains the same position for a different reason: that once-
disenfranchised groups should be included within the sphere of political discourse. He
expressly argues that identity issues must be set in the background for a constitutional democracy
to function effectively (1994). However, a reading of the Jamaican materials as well as accounts
from other regions underline that the marginalization and disenfranchisement of certain fractions
of the “nation” is often constitutive of a given democracy. The examples are known and
numerous even if, paradoxically, they are also usually hidden by state-sponsored
misrepresentation and the art of collective amnesia. Some examples: Abercrombie (1991)
illustrates that the exclusion of its “Indian” population has been a pillar, and Creole
presupposition, of democracy in Bolivia and Peru; Karakasidou (1994) demonstrates that the
incorporation in a marginalized state of its Macedonian populace has been central to the Greek
state’s imagination of itself; Dharmasdasa (1992) shows that the same sort of exclusionary
politics marginalizes the Tamil Indians of Sri Lanka; Coronil and Skurski (1991) illustrate that a
parade of Venezuelan governments have pursued policies designed to efface and erase the
politics of the poor; Povinelli (1998, 1999) indicates how the systematic exclusion of Aborigines
has oriented the discourse and policies of “white settler” democracy in Australia; Dominy (1995)
makes the same point for the Maori of New Zealand; Gilroy (1993), Roediger (1994), Hacker
(1992), and many others have shown that the exclusion of African-Americans and Ameri-Indians has, from the inception of the republic, underlay the shaping of American consciousness and liberal democracy. In many instances, it is not simply a matter of greater inclusion and enfranchisement—either within political institutions or sphere of communication—because many putatively democratic nation states inscribe the marginalization of certain social segments in the design of governance itself. Both the orthodox proceduralist view and that of Habermas are too normative and Westocentric to appreciate what ethnography of democracy clearly underlines: that the historical production of democracy has often been founded on the systematic production of unfreedom for certain groups. One critical result is that many identity-based movements are frequently no longer satisfied with the palliatives of redistributive justice—such as more votes or more jobs. They increasingly view such justice as a partial step, believing that the only way to introduce genuine structural change is through greater autonomy (e.g. federalism), full independence (e.g. Macedonia), or the assumption of power (e.g. South Africa being a case in point). Looking worldwide, there is no doubt that the failures attributed to Jamaican democracy are widespread, but equally that from a comparative perspective the degree of repression and unfreedom in Jamaica is much less than in many more places. Nonetheless, what the various theories advanced from the West and incorporated in the discourse of democracy do not permit us to grasp are those forms of “unfreedom” constitutive of any specific state, such as Jamaica. On these grounds, Henke is able to show that in the two largest Anglophone Caribbean islands, Jamaica and Trinidad, the subsumption of the planter class by the middle class resulted in a concept and practice of democracy that excluded the Black majority. They constructed a conception of emancipation founded on relief from white, British, colonial rule. Achieving this entails free elections, rights of assembly and press, and other legal measures meant to insure the
felicity and authenticity of these procedures. In the same tradition, the current political elite concentrate on the celebration of the historical process of gaining access to basic procedural freedoms, though even here, political violence and government efforts to curb the investigatory arm of the press sometimes endanger these freedoms.

The underlying claim and critical edge of Henke’s argument is the necessity at once practical and historical for a concept of democracy that supercedes the procedural view—that grasps democracy as something more than freedom of choice. He would like a broader concept of democracy to embrace a set of emancipatory aims, to be guided by a sense of social justice, and to include the Black population within the very character of Jamaican democracy itself. This view essentially argues that democracy will be a culturally and historically specific composite of an increasingly universal and EuroAmerican sponsored procedural notion with Jamaican and Caribbean-wide ideas and images of democracy. What ossifies Jamaican democracy is a very narrow and overly celebrated procedural vision that allows the creation of a structure of governance whose existence in its current form depends on the exclusion, marginalization, and resignation of much of the Black populace. To accomplish such an emancipation would require the Jamaican state to transcend the constraints of globalizing capitalism and to pursue policies of redistribution and justice that are sufficiently modest not to offend institutional lenders, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, which specialize in politically-motivated economic decisions.

Our rehearsal and interpretation of Henke’s argument is better than the original. The significant reason is that Henke does not ground his critique in a theory of the interrelationship between culture, politics, and globalization/encompassment. He relies instead on a notion of political culture which he understands as “a normative concept” that “involves three essential
aspects: 1) uncensored public discourse, 2) selection of political leaders in a process of free choice, and 3) accountability and assumption of responsibility by private and public sector leaders” (p.9). But this notion of political culture is a fraternal twin of procedural notions of democracy (cited above). An apparent weakness of this view is that Henke has to stretch for examples of ways in which the present government abridges or violates these procedures. The best he can do is cite a bill designed to punish the publication of certain information that after vigorous resistance by, among others, the Jamaican national press, was withdrawn. It is easier to make the reverse argument—that, due to its long history of resistance to colonialism, its exposure to a European tradition of liberal civil rights, and sometimes pressure from the United States and its allied institutions (e.g. World Bank), the Caribbean has a relatively good record of maintaining procedural democracies. What is conspicuously absent is a substantive Jamaican image of democracy, especially one that included all Blacks within the understanding of democracy itself and embraced a concept of social justice that would mandate the provisioning of social goods (such as jobs and housing). One reason that a visit by the then President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, was such as occasion of joy and hope throughout Jamaica (and many other nations as well) is precisely because a Mandela-led African National Congress ratified a constitution that mandates substantive goals. Nonetheless, as Koelble (1998; in press) has demonstrated, pressure from foreign banks and transnational corporations has compelled the ANC to delay or cut back on these substantive objectives.
The notion of political culture is more fundamentally weak because it is too decisively
domestic to accommodate or bear the weight of the large-scale epochal transformations that are
progressively redefining and contextualizing national political economies and cultures. As such,
the notion of political culture cannot honor the complexities of a world in which the
EuroAmerican metropole encompasses nation-states such as Jamaica and those of the Caribbean
generally in global processes and relations over which they can exert little influence. Not the
least of the problems is that the emerging planetary economy continues to devalue labor and
commodities (such as agricultural products and mass produced apparel) in favor of
technologically accelerated and amplified flows of financial capital and knowledge (LiPuma and
Lee, in press). The globalizing economy is relentlessly draining the value out of Jamaica’s chief
economic assets and resources: sugar, mining, and inexpensive labor. As the nations on the
margins are quickly finding out, the global economy is like a snake in that it mostly bites the
barefooted. That since 1973—which marks the beginning of (post)modern globalization (Lee
and LiPuma 2000)—Jamaica and other commodity and labor intensive economies have remained
stagnant reflects this reality. Furthermore, the contraction of wealth and the possibilities of
generating it tend to increase competition between the have and have-nots, and to promote the
cooption of the political system to maintain the economic, social, and cultural capital of the
empowered class. And with value-addition rapidly speeding away from the Jamaican economy,
it also becomes increasingly difficult to fund the social projects necessary to economically
emancipate the bottom portion of citizens and thus provide greater freedom. As significantly and
from another angle, the transnational banks and the multilateral funding institutions, such as the
IMF, award access to capital based on the extent to which a nation-state is a capitalist,
procedurally-exclusive democracy. States that strive toward greater social justice and income
redistribution are castigated as leaning toward socialism, and understood as posing a greater risk for lending institutions and bondholders. Indeed, most of the leadership of the marginalized nation-states finds itself in an unenviable and nearly inescapable dilemma: the policies and degree of income and resource redistribution necessary to satisfy the demands and needs of the disenfranchised members of the populace are far too substantive and socialist for the global financial markets. This reality all but compels these national politicians to devise strategies of rhetoric and representation to appeal to and placate their two publics. In the global sphere, national leaders strive to represent their political economy and culture as a stable, capitalist, democratic republic with only the most modest emancipatory and redistributive goals. This requires both policies that do not swing too far socialist and the representation of those policies as centrist. To do anything else would all but eliminate the prospect of securing any international financing. Toward local publics, especially those that are economically disenfranchised or who militate for more social justice (such as the academic community), they must exaggerate the welcome effects of redistributive policies and find ways of diverting attention toward forms of production that they can control: namely, the production of symbols and local representations. So Henke’s account is descriptively accurate in that the current political leadership of Jamaica actively celebrates a celebratory notion of freedom—illustrated by the state’s attempt to manage the memory of the legendary freedom fighter and emancipator, Marcus Garvey—even as the conjuncture of a colonially-inspired pattern of leadership and highly asymmetrical global processes serve to ossify and disable the process of emancipation by draining it of any real substantive content. Let it be very clear that what is happening in Jamaica is a worldwide phenomena. Nonetheless, it is impossible to construct a critical democratic theory adequate to its (post)modern object based on a purely domestic and narrow notion of
political culture.

To theorize the theory, current concepts of political culture ought to be the object of critique rather than its standpoint. The reason is that political culture is only the quasi-objective and normative (and normatized) appearance of domestic politics. What is concealed are the ways in which contemporary capitalism increasingly animated by transnational systems of circulation encompasses and compromises the national economies and politics of especially the more marginalized nation-states. The result is an increasingly abstract and de-centered form of domination that cannot be adequately conceptualized in terms of direct political domination or concrete social domination by one class/racial/regional grouping over another. In ethnographic terms, an analysis of the ambitions and inadequacies of the Jamaican ruling class, no matter how perceptive and true, are by themselves insufficient to grasp the determinations that define the contemporary Jamaican situation. Bracketing the structuring effects of capitalism was not so obviously problematic through the 1960s when one could rationally imagine, as many did (exemplified by Habermas 1994; 1996), that the political sphere had irreversibly trumped and triumphed over socioeconomic structures. However, in the context of the contemporary form of capitalist globalization based on the expansion and the quasi-autonomy of emerging structures of circulation whose immanent dynamic is the encompassment of national political economies, it becomes increasingly hard to imagine that a critique of Caribbean or any democracy can stand on political legs alone. However much the leaders of Jamaica try to fend off the kind of instrumental rationality that leads them to use images of freedom to justify unfreedom, they cannot alter the reality that they and many Others are caught in the vise of economic processes over which they can exercise little control. So it is turning out that the Jamaican public sphere, including whatever internal discourse might be instigated by Henke’s paper, is not an adequately
expansive space for launching a critique of democracy. Indeed, Henke, like many others who would detach the political from the economic, presupposes the existence of a structure whose waning is one of the central causes of both the reality and awareness of the current predicament: the existence of an interventionist state that governs a national economy over which it is sovereign. For the reality of our times, for nation-states like Jamaica, the possibility of national freedom is unfolding within a context of increasing global subjugation and unfreedom.

Notes

1. As articulated in mainstream political science and sister disciplines, such as international relations, the global transition to modernity, including democracy, turns on a handful of culture-neutral transformations that the West may have launched but which are not specifically Western. The pillars of this modernity are Euro-American capitalism, the democratic nation-state, and Western culture: Euro-American capitalism is the character of economic and technological activity, the democratic nation-state is the form of universal politics, and the tenets of Western culture are the basis for a global sociality. The premise is that the modern is causing forms of premodern sociality and collectivity to wither, the universal rationality of the modern motivating agents worldwide to replace their institutions with those of the West. A critical normative and prospective dimension of the modernist project is the attempt to introduce a dominant form of sociality, the rights-bearing individual, and a dominant form of collectivity, the democratic nation-state. They are to predominate over, and over time efface, other forms and principles of collectivity, such as ethnicity and religion, and other forms of interpersonal sociality, such as the family. This view sees each pillars as endowed with its own structures and dynamic, and so even though they overlap and coordinate, they also may contradict, conflict, and have unequal
historical rhythms. Accordingly, a driving dynamic of the twentieth century is the struggle to
continually realign these dimensions of the modern when, as in the case of communism and
ethnic conflicts, they swerve off course or collide. The mainstream viewpoint posits this vision
of modernity as the normative and ideological model realized or realizable in every and any
locale. Against the mainstream political science/international relations view of the world, there
is a rising set of especially subaltern voices that argue for “alter/native modernities” on the
understanding that as capitalism, the nation-state, and Euro-American culture penetrate the world
of Others, they intertwine with existing cultures and polities in ways that ignite transformations
that are highly creative and unpredictable (see Gaonkar 1999; LiPuma 2000).

2. We have placed the “post” in postmodern in brackets to indicate that the world now consists of
alternative modernities that stand in relationship and counterpoint to the progress of the
postmodern in the metropole.

3. Few academics have any idea of the size or importance of the currency markets, primarily
because academia has historically focused on systems of production. But let us provide some
idea of the scale of these markets: according to the Federal Reserve, the gross transnational
product of the currencies markets in a slow week (about a half trillion dollars) is far greater than
the GNP of Jamaica in the entire 20th century.

4. Because the value of currencies, such as those of Jamaica, Ecuador, Haiti, and many others
economically marginal countries are set in U.S. dollars and Euros, these states do not have
independent, domestically controlled currencies. They are actually derivatives of U.S. dollars
and Euros. It would make absolutely no economic difference if they abandoned their own
currencies altogether and used U.S. dollars. In fact, economists have argued that it would be
economically advantageous for these states to switch to dollars: it would save them the cost of
printing and maintaining a currency and it would curb inflation by preventing the government from printing money to meet its domestic needs. Ecuador has indeed made such a switch. After hesitating because of the symbolic implications of adopting the currency of the hegemonic power, it decided in September 2000 to begin using the American dollar in place of the sucre as its domestic currency. In October, Panama switched to the American dollar followed by El Salvador in November. Argentina has pegged the peso to the dollar; Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, and Honduras are currently contemplating the shift, and in all likelihood most of the other states of the Americas will have followed suited by 2003. There are naturally no outstanding economic consequences as the change only recognizes and capitalizes on an already existing reality. For all intents and purposes, the national currency of states such as Jamaica is nothing more or less than advertising space for the domestic political agenda, so much so that economists have pointed out that many of these states would be better off economically if they rented out the reverse side of the bills to commercial advertisers.

5. In its democratic capacity, Cuba did, however, offer to send observers to the United States to help supervise the recount of Florida’s presidential vote. The Cuban-Americans in Miami were apparently not amused.

References [Au: Taylor and Francis requests that full first names, volume and issue numbers, and state locations be given for each reference listed. Please verify that information inserted (highlighted in blue) is correct or provide if missing]


Anthropological Association.

LiPuma, Edward 1999. *Democracy as a Cultural Concept, among other Things*.  Paper 
presented at the University of Cape Town, 17 October 2000.

University of Michigan Press.

LiPuma, Edward and Benjamin Lee In press. *Financial Derivatives and the Globalization of 


Mamdani, Mahmood 1996. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late 

Diamond and Marc Plattner, eds.  Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press.
  pp. 36-48.

Sociology* 19(?): 7-17.

Povinelli, Elizabeth 1998.  The State of Shame: Australian Multiculturalism and the Crisis of 

19-48.

Robotham, Don In press Freedom Ossified or Economic Crisis: a Comment on Holger Henke. Identities.


